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President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Henze (Germany), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued) (E/1996/4 and Corr.1; E/1996/18 and Add.1)

(b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREED CONCLUSIONS ON THE THEME OF THE 1995 COORDINATION SEGMENT OF THE COUNCIL (E/1996/59)

The PRESIDENT drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General in document E/1996/59.

Mr. KHAN (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD)), introducing the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/59), said that the agreed conclusions of the Council's 1995 coordination segment had envisaged actions to be taken by the Council itself, recommendations to the General Assembly, and actions to be taken by the inter-agency machinery and organizations of the United Nations system.

Where the Council was concerned, progress had been made in establishing closer linkages between its work and that of its subsidiary bodies, such as the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Council's decision to hold a debate on poverty also followed from the agreed conclusions.

Substantial progress had been made by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which had set in motion its discussions of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa and had established the Inter-Agency Committee on Women. A large number of thematic inter-agency groups had been set up to monitor work at the country level and were providing input to the Council.

Ms. DENGO (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Secretary-General's report failed to provide analyses of progress achieved and problems encountered and did not contain specific recommendations on the issues involved. Nor did it specify ways to strengthen

the Council's function of coordinating development policies and activities at the level of the United Nations system. The Group of 77 and China considered such coordination essential, and therefore requested the Secretariat to provide such analysis and recommendations.

As the highest intergovernmental mechanism for the formulation and appraisal of economic and social policy matters, the General Assembly should set the broad policy framework. The Council should integrate the work of its subsidiary bodies and coordinate the policies and activities of the United Nations system in the follow-up and implementation of major United Nations conferences. It should consider organizing its programme of work on a multi-year basis, as was already being done by the functional commissions.

The Group of 77 and China believed that the selection of cross-cutting themes for the work of the task forces established by ACC would have benefited from intergovernmental consultations. Moreover, United Nations development agencies should be allowed an active role in the work of the task force on an enabling environment for social and economic development. That task force should focus on an enabling international as well as national environment and should refrain from adopting World Bank-related approaches and conditionalities. The ACC task forces should submit their reports to the coordination segment of the Council's substantive session as a major input to intergovernmental deliberation and decision-making.

In the area of collaboration between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions, the Group of 77 and China wanted greater emphasis on the implementation of the national and international commitments of developed countries in the context of the major United Nations conferences. While Governments had been implementing their commitments at the national level, resources pledged by the international community for the implementation of the recommendations of those conferences had not been provided at the agreed levels, thereby increasing the burden on national budgets. New and innovative ideas to secure adequate resources for international development were therefore of the utmost importance.

Mr. CAMPBELL (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and also Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, said that the results of the major international conferences organized by the United Nations in the economic,

social and related fields marked a new and more intensive degree of cooperation between the members of the international community in promoting the development of all people. The integrated nature of those results, which addressed a wide range of interlocking issues of fundamental importance, clearly demanded an integrated response; without proper and effective coordination, the roles envisaged in the various programmes of action resulting in the conferences could well come to naught. As the central mechanism for such coordination, the Council should consider the issue at an early stage as part of a continuous and ongoing process.

It was clear from the report (E/1996/59) that the agreed conclusions had been only partly implemented, yet the reasons for that situation had not been analysed in any real depth. Considerable progress had been made in strengthening inter-agency coordination at all levels; however, there was a need for increased complementarity and transparency between the work of ACC and the Council, particularly when they were addressing the same subject.

In the area of reporting, the initiatives being undertaken in response to paragraph 21.1 of the agreed conclusions were commendable; the necessary measures must be taken to prevent overlap. It was gratifying that more reports emanating from the Secretariat contained specific recommendations, although some of them could be more action-oriented. Further information should be given on the action that was being taken to implement paragraphs 20 and 21 of the conclusions, in particular regarding the role of the inter-agency task forces. Furthermore, there were still unacceptable delays in submitting reports.

Responsibility for the lack of progress must also be shared by Member States. There had been few real improvements in the working methods of the Council or the General Assembly. While there had been some progress in the area of the functional commissions, much remained to be done.

The most important element in the implementation of the conclusions had been the adoption of General Assembly resolution 50/227; that resolution must be implemented promptly and, in particular, the Council should take up the provisions with respect to its subsidiary bodies as soon as possible. It was to be hoped that the negotiations on an agenda for development would be completed in the near future.

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia) said that the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/59) should have contained recommendations for more effective

implementation of the agreed conclusions, especially those concerning the follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the economic and social areas. There was also a need for more specific recommendations to the General Assembly.

The linkages between an agenda for development and the follow-up to the conferences should be further elaborated. The Secretariat could recommend ways in which the implementation of an agenda for development and of the commitments adopted at the conferences could be mutually reinforced; the follow-up to the Council's decisions in that area should focus on substantive issues, not merely on discussion of the jurisdictions of the Second and Third Committees. Moreover, there was a need for the Secretary-General to identify ways to strengthen the work of the regional commissions, in particular with regard to their participation in the implementation of regional conferences.

In the area of inter-agency coordination, the priorities established by the General Assembly and the Council should guide the selection of themes by ACC. His delegation was unclear as to why the focus of the ACC thematic task forces was restricted to follow-up at the national level. It also wished to know how the themes selected by ACC related to those to be identified by the Council for recommendation to the General Assembly. Further clarification was needed as to why the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development had been made responsible for the general streamlining of conference-related reports including those dealing with subjects other than sustainable development.

The issue of mobilization of resources was of great importance to his delegation, as was the need to keep that issue distinct from the topic of new and innovative ideas for generating funds; such ideas could not be considered alternative options for fulfilling commitments on resource mobilization.

International cooperation for development had dwindled in recent years, despite the growing number of United Nations conferences. He urged Governments to make a clearer political commitment to re-establishing international cooperation in such truly crucial areas for economic growth as money, finance, trade, technology transfer and macroeconomic coordination at the global level.

Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) put forward a three-pronged proposal concerning the reviews of the Council's machinery requested by the General Assembly in resolution 50/227. First, in order to facilitate the review called for in paragraph 71 of that resolution, the Secretary-General should be

requested to collect background information about the products of those bodies, the nature of their deliberations, their relationships with other bodies and the source of their secretariat and expert support. A one-week resumed session of the Council could then be held early in 1997 to begin the review. Any further action or decisions could be taken during the 1997 substantive session. Second, the review of the mandates, composition, functions and working methods of the functional commissions and experts groups and bodies (resolution 50/227, para. 70) should be included as a sub-item in the agenda for the substantive session in 1997. Lastly, internal reviews of the regional commissions could be expedited by requesting the executive secretaries to initiate or complete their internal reviews, as appropriate, and to report to the Council at its substantive session in 1997. A further sub-item, on the examination of the reports, should be included in the agenda for that session. His delegation would be submitting a draft resolution embodying its proposal, which he hoped the Council would support.

Mr. YU Qingtai (China) said that the important consensus on the aims and principles of development cooperation reached at recent United Nations conferences needed to be followed up by concrete and effective action. Economic growth, particularly in developing countries, should be pursued with attention to social development and environmental protection. A holistic view should be taken of follow-up activities. Institutional concerns, such as strengthening the development role of the United Nations, should not distract from consideration of financial resources, technology transfer, improving the international economic environment, and other substantive issues.

The agreed conclusions adopted by the Council provided some positive suggestions for comprehensive follow-up to the major international conferences. The Council should taken action to ensure their implementation.

Ms. ENGELBRECHT (South Africa), after expressing her delegation's support for the statement delivered by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the agreed conclusions (E/1996/59) provided a useful starting-point for the Council's efforts and discussions.

Although her country had not been able to attend the World Summit for Children in 1990, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, it was taking steps to

implement the recommendations of those conferences at the national level. South Africa had ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, and those rights were embodied in its Constitution. The principle of a "first call for children", whereby the needs of children were considered paramount, was incorporated in its reconstruction and development programme. International human rights instruments were the cornerstone of South Africa's human rights policy, and its Constitution guaranteed the rights of all and affirmed democratic values.

Referring to General Assembly resolution 50/161, she expressed her delegation's support for the strengthening of the Commission for Social Development. Since such issues as poverty eradication were being dealt with by various functional commissions, there seemed to be some degree of unnecessary duplication. Her delegation therefore agreed with the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/61) on refocusing the work of the functional commissions and improving the division of labour.

She noted the important role being played by the Commission for Sustainable Development in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1997 should be viewed as an opportunity to coordinate a global partnership for sustainable development within the United Nations system. The special session would provide an opportunity for ensuring that the principles endorsed by the Rio Conference were being upheld, that the necessary resources were forthcoming and that the implementation of Agenda 21 was being continued.

Her delegation welcomed the enlargement of the Commission on Population and Development, which would facilitate the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development. Both the Cairo Conference and the recently concluded United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) had made important statements on the provision of adequate shelter for a growing and increasingly urbanized world population.

Increasing food self-sufficiency in Africa, where the rural population was largely engaged in agriculture, required investing in the poor and supporting measures to alleviate the effects of such natural phenomena as drought and encroaching deserts. Her delegation hoped that the forthcoming World Food Summit would take specific regional initiatives into account. It stressed the

importance of the broadest possible grass-roots involvement in the implementation of the recommendations of United Nations conferences.

South Africa's commitment to the empowerment of women was reflected in its Constitution, which prohibited discrimination on any grounds, including gender. Her country had ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in December 1995 and would be establishing a Commission on Gender Equality. It was currently attempting to integrate gender considerations into all its national programme activities. In order to ensure an effective follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Council should examine, on a regular basis, the extent to which gender factors had been taken into account in the recommendations of all the functional commissions. The Beijing Platform for Action must be implemented throughout the United Nations system as an integral part of programming, including by bodies which did not ordinarily deal with the advancement of women. There was still a need for increased coordination and cooperation among the various organizations of the United Nations system. Lastly, an adequate flow of resources was vital to a successful follow-up in the case of all United Nations conferences.

Mr. SOEPRAPTO (Indonesia), after expressing his appreciation of the format of the report (E/1996/59), which greatly facilitated the discussion, said that inadequate resources and a lack of political will were a problem common to all follow-up efforts and that the most effective remedy would be the pursuit of new and innovative ideas for generating funds. Since the General Assembly was responsible for reviewing the implementation of each action programme, it should provide further political impetus for the implementation of the follow-up. That could be done through the high-level discussion of selected themes of follow-up, utilizing the mechanism provided by resolution 50/122, which called for a renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership.

Referring to paragraph 5.2 of the agreed conclusions (E/1996/59), he said that coherence and complementarity would be improved if the Council made policy recommendations to the Assembly regarding effective and coordinated follow-up to major international conferences. Concerning paragraph 6.1, on strengthening the role of the Council, he believed that, within the framework of cross-cutting issues, there was a need to build and pursue commonalities as the substantive basis for a coordinated and goal-oriented approach. Referring to paragraph 8.1,

he said that the discussions in the policy dialogue and the coordination segment with the Bretton Woods institutions should be more focused in the future. He agreed with the statement in paragraph 14 that the regional commissions had been active participants in the preparation of and follow-up to the recent international conferences. He wondered, however, why the role of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was not adequately reflected in the report, particularly since ESCAP had been active in the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development.

With respect to paragraph 16.1, he stressed the need for a coordinated approach in setting up multi-year programmes of work for the follow-up to and review of conference programmes of action, thereby establishing continuity from one conference theme to the next. In that connection, he also stressed the need for cooperation among the officers of the various bodies.

His delegation fully supported the ideas outlined in paragraph 18 of the agreed conclusions. Concerning inter-agency coordination, it believed that the mechanism provided by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) had yielded results of varying effectiveness. The ACC inter-agency task forces operating at the field level should maximize such existing mechanisms as the field-level committees and the thematic working groups. The systematic exchange of information would improve the linkage between coordination at the Secretariat level and coordination at the intergovernmental level. His delegation also believed that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) should play a stronger role in the task force on the enabling environment for economic and social development.

His delegation agreed that major cooperative initiatives had been launched by the United Nations system in many countries (para. 19.1). It would appreciate an explanation of the "global task forces" referred to in that paragraph.

With regard to cooperation between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (para. 23), he said that his delegation attached great importance to the establishment of modalities for bringing together the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly for the benefit of developing countries. In that connection, the General Assembly and the Council must play a central role in formulating

guidelines for further collaboration. Such guidelines should, inter alia, provide focus for cooperation at the field level. A closer relationship must be developed between the General Assembly and the Council on the one hand and the Interim Committee of the International Monetary Fund and the joint Bank/Fund Development Committee on the other.

The regrettable decline in financial support for the follow-up to United Nations conferences, for the Council itself and for official development assistance reflected, above all, a lack of political will. That situation must be remedied.

Ms. LEBL (United States of America) expressed interest in the suggestions put forward by the Group of 77 and China that the Council should consider organizing its programme of work on a multi-year basis and that the reports of the ACC inter-agency task forces, whose importance had become apparent during previous sessions of the Council, should be considered during the coordination segment of the Council. Referring to the Canadian proposal for implementing some of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/227, she said that the review called for in paragraph 70, which must be completed by the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, should be given priority over the review requested in paragraph 71.

Mr. GERUS (Belarus) said that there was a need to improve coordination of the measures taken by the United Nations to implement the conclusions and recommendations of recent major international conferences by adopting a comprehensive approach to the implementation of programmes of action. It being too early to assess the results of the new working arrangements introduced by the Council for agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, it would be more helpful to discuss the key principles underlying those arrangements. The Council and its subsidiary bodies must be guided by General Assembly resolution 50/227. The efforts to develop coordination at the country level, and in particular the establishment of the three inter-agency task forces, were commendable, and the development of a common database would be very useful.

The Council's work should focus on practical implementation of the decisions of the major international conferences, taking into account the interests of all groups of countries. That would make it possible to better coordinate the work of the subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies and

enhance the Council's role as the organ which formulated a political platform of concrete socio-economic action for development. The determination of priority objectives and areas of cooperation at the practical level for subsidiary bodies of the Council would make it possible to strengthen the coordinating role of the Council. Coordination efforts were being concentrated at the country level, and insufficient attention was being paid to ensuring consistency in the adoption of decisions on related questions at the level of the United Nations specialized agencies.

The Council should consider the need for further work by the regional commissions in implementing the results of global conferences. Belarus was interested in the activity of the Economic Commission for Europe in that regard. His delegation proposed that at the 1997 coordination segment the Council should consider the question of the role of regional and subregional organizations in the integrated implementation of programmes and plans of action of major international conferences organized by the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields. The consideration of that issue would help further enhance the work of the United Nations in assisting economies in transition and developing countries.

Cooperation between the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization was of the utmost importance in implementing the results of major international conferences and should be expanded with a view to providing technical assistance to countries with economies in transition. Effective follow-up to conferences was impossible without the mobilization of the necessary resources. The Council should endeavour to find additional sources of financing for programmes which were designed to resolve global problems in the interests of all mankind.

His delegation supported the idea of holding short special sessions of the Council to consider a question of interest to all groups of countries. That would enable the Council to take up a larger number of issues, react more expeditiously to recent developments, and respond more effectively to the needs of individual groups of countries. Consideration should be given to reducing the length of the Council's substantive session in order to make such sessions possible.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA attach great importance to the follow-up to the recent major

global conferences and to effective system-wide collaboration to facilitate such follow-up, in particular, at the country level. The inter-agency task force on the International Conference on Population and Development had developed guidelines to assist the resident coordinator system and had prepared a common advocacy statement identifying key social and economic development premises endorsed by the United Nations system. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) had subsequently expanded the mandate of the task force, which was chaired by UNFPA, to focus on basic social services for all.

The task force maintained close links with two other ACC Task Forces, on employment and sustainable livelihoods and on the enabling environment for economic and social development, and with the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, with a view to rationalizing and strengthening the delivery of coordinated United Nations assistance so as to enable countries to implement the goals of the conferences in the context of their development priorities and strategies. She described a number of the activities of the Task Force on basic social services for all, which sought to build on the resident coordinator system and the country strategy note. Resident coordinators had underscored the need to identify appropriate indicators for measuring progress in reaching conference goals and for monitoring programme effectiveness in relevant sectors and to devise guidelines covering, inter alia, modalities for building country capacity in the basic social services.

UNFPA emphasized coordination with its United Nations partners in its core programme areas: reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health; population and development strategies; and advocacy.

On the question of resources, she said that countries must make a concerted effort to mobilize domestic resources for social development priorities, and the international community must do its part to implement the Programme of Action agreed to at the International Conference on Population and Development and the instruments of the other major conferences. The 20/20 initiative should facilitate that process. The executive heads of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund and UNFPA had recently sent a joint letter calling on their field offices to work with countries in implementing the 20/20 initiative.

Ms. SIBAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO believed that, with full support for coordinated and integrated follow-up to the recent major global conferences it was not necessary to establish any new bodies for that purpose. Arrangements had been put in place in the UNESCO secretariat to ensure appropriate adjustments and modifications in its priorities and future programmes with a view to such follow-up.

The successful implementation of the resolutions adopted at the conferences could not be achieved by institutions and Governments on their own. It required the mobilization of all members of society, particularly of young people. A change in behaviour was required to achieve the goal of solidarity, without which there could be neither sustainable development nor sustainable peace.

UNESCO looked forward to the finalization of the terms of reference of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women. It was in the process of developing a coherent approach to the recommendations of the conferences pertaining to its spheres of competence. It had a specific role to play in: endogenous capacity-building; development of rural areas; fostering popular participation through democratization and respect for human rights; promotion of environmental awareness and rational use of resources for sustainable development; and improvement of communication worldwide through the use of new information and communication technologies and enhancement of access to communication.

UNESCO chaired the working group on basic education of the ACC Task Force on basic social services for all and had produced guidelines for resident coordinators. It was serving as task manager for chapter 36 of Agenda 21, and its mandate as task manager for environmental education had been further strengthened. She drew attention to the annex to her statement, which had been circulated, covering UNESCO activities in the field of education as a follow-up to major United Nations conferences. In conclusion, she underscored the importance of truly intersectoral mechanisms for coordination at the national and international levels.

Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Russian Federation) said that most of the Council's conclusions and recommendations had been reflected in General Assembly resolution 50/227, which contained very specific suggestions. In some cases, however, the resolution merely made recommendations for further consideration instead of advocating concrete measures.

On the role of the General Assembly, his delegation felt that there was a need to reflect fully in an agenda for development concrete recommendations on enhancing the effectiveness and rationalizing the work of the General Assembly, through, inter alia, improving the quality of documentation, promoting a coordinated approach to the consideration of the economic and social dimensions of development, and utilizing the capacity of the bureaux of the General Assembly and its committees to improve coordination.

Where the strengthening of the role of the Council was concerned, there was a need to define more clearly the procedure for choosing themes for consideration in the coordination segment, so as to avoid lengthy negotiations each year. The Secretary-General's proposals for 1995 should be revived, and additional ideas and proposals from the Secretariat should be encouraged. In general, the Secretariat had succeeded in preparing a single comprehensive report for the coordination segment; however, while maintaining the general approach, the length of the report should be reduced to a reasonable level.

At the current session, the Council needed to consider the reports of the regional economic commissions and the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and programmes of work of the functional commissions. At the same time, the Bureau and the Secretariat should regularly submit concrete proposals to the Council on how to remove from the Council's agenda the items which had lost their relevance.

On the question of streamlining the work and strengthening the role of the functional commissions, a procedure and time-limits needed to be determined for the review of the mandates, composition and working methods of the functional commissions. The process should be started in January-February 1997 in order to enable the Council to agree on recommendations with regard to the future structure of its subsidiary bodies and adopt specific measures before the end of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Regarding inter-agency coordination at all levels, his delegation stressed the need to adopt specific recommendations to ACC on a wide range of coordination problems, particularly since the coordination segment would be replacing the Joint Meetings of ACC and the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

Thus far, no far-reaching measures had been taken to rationalize the preparation of reports and reporting requirements. Although measures were under

consideration, there were no real parameters for results or a time-frame for their introduction. The process should be expedited, and the Council should make recommendations to the Secretary-General in that respect. Despite the political sensitivity and technical complexity of the question of reducing the volume of documentation, steps must be taken to enhance the quality of documents, cut the costs of their preparation, and ensure timely presentation.

The Council should adopt a decision that would make it possible to revert to the item under consideration at future sessions.

Mr. KHAN (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD)), replying to comments and suggestions made during the discussion, said, with reference to the observation that document E/1996/59 should have provided more analysis and recommendations, that the document should be viewed as complementary to the report of the Secretary-General on poverty eradication (E/1996/61) and the conference room paper on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 circulated at the current session (E/1996/CRP.3). It was for the Council to determine what intergovernmental action was required.

The comments made by delegation concerning reporting would be taken fully into account. A genuine effort was being made to provide consolidated reports to serve as the basis for the Council's deliberations and negotiations. The Secretariat had prepared a consolidated report extracting relevant elements from the reports of agency executive boards and funds, and the process would be extended to the functional commissions in 1997. The Secretariat also was focusing on streamlining and reducing the volume of reports in order to avoid proliferation.

Turning to cooperation between ACC and the Council, he said that ACC had made a concerted effort to respond to the agreed conclusions of the Council at the national, regional and global levels, as could be seen from document E/1996/18. ACC also had adopted a thematic approach to the coordination of the follow-up to the major global conferences.

The Council had been provided at its current session with ample information concerning the work of the ACC task forces established with a view to such coordination. The progress made by the task forces was a clear indication of the United Nations system's commitment to a coordinated approach to discharging the mandates established by the conferences and reflected the decentralized

approach advocated by the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the agencies.

In conclusion, he said that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization were active participants in the ACC task force on an enabling environment for development, that the Council's comments would be brought to the attention of the task force, which was to meet very soon, and that the latter's report would in turn be brought to the Council's attention through ACC.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.